

GRAZING

The BLM is currently in the process of assessing all grazing allotments to ascertain if current grazing use is meeting the 5 Standards for Rangeland Health and meeting the Guidelines for grazing management (S&G's). This process is required by the grazing regulations that were a result of the Bureau's "Healthy Rangelands" initiative (a.k.a. "Rangeland Reform '94"). S&G EA assessments analyze existing information to characterize the general health of a grazing allotment (or other unit of public land) within the framework of the 5 Standards for Rangeland Health. The 5 Standards are summarized as follows: Standard 1 - Watershed Function - Uplands; Standard 2 - Watershed Function - Riparian/Wetland Areas; Standard 3 - Ecological Processes; Standard 4 - Water Quality; and Standard 5 - Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species. The S&G's assessments identify if the Standards are being met and if not, the significant factors contributing to failure to meet Standards. The S&G's process is, by policy, currently directed at only livestock grazing.

As the Wood River property was formally a grazing allotment, an Standards assessment is in the process of being prepared. The Wood River ROD/RMP states that "If and where appropriate, use livestock grazing as a vegetation management tool to support the primary goal of wetland restoration." Since 1994, livestock use has been considered incompatible with the ongoing wetland restoration activities and is expected to continue to be considered incompatible for the foreseeable future. Since no licensed grazing use has been authorized on the property since November 1994, BLM authorized livestock will not be a factor in the attainment or non-attainment of any Standard. The Wood River property S&G's assessment is expected to be completed during the spring of 2000.

9/15/99

WOOD RIVER ALLOTMENT (30855) KLAMATH FALLS RESOURCE AREA - KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON RANGELAND HEALTH STANDARDS ASSESSMENT

The Wood River Property was formally designated as a grazing allotment (and given allotment number 30885) in 1993 after the *first 1500 acres* was purchased by the BLM, with assistance from the American Lands Conservancy (ALC). As part of the property purchase agreement between the ALC and the BLM, a temporary, non-renewable grazing lease was issued for two years. The lease was issued to help facilitate the purchase transaction, to allow time for baseline data on various resources to be collected, and to allow the BLM time to prepare a management plan. The "Final Upper Klamath Basin and Wood River Wetland Resource Management Plan/EIS" (PRMP/FEIS) was published in July 1995, with the Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (ROD) signed in February 1996. (Note: much of this assessment is based on information from that planning effort.)

The PRMP/FEIS includes a comprehensive overview of the conditions of the property prior to completion of that plan (Chapter 2 - Affected Environment, pages 2-12 to 2-26). This includes discussions on the substantial alterations made by the diking and draining, livestock grazing, water resources, fish and wildlife, soil resources, and much more. That information will not be repeated here. If the reader of this Assessment desires more information or clarification please reference that document.

The PRMP/FEIS and ROD established the following overall objective for the property:

Restore the Wood River property to its previous function as a wetland community, within unalterable constraints (such as water rights, land ownership patterns, and available funding). Long-term improvements in water quality entering Agency Lake is the goal; however, localized decreases in water quality could occur in the short term. Emphasize improving and increasing wetland and riparian habitats for federally listed fish and other wildlife. Allow labor-intensive, highly engineered wetland restoration methods using complex designs; however, the preference would be to use wetland restoration systems and methods that were designed with less labor-intensive practices using the existing landscape features (such as topography) and natural energies (such as stream flows) of the property. Use vegetation management (including water level and flow fluctuations, livestock grazing, fire, chemical and mechanical manipulation) to develop desired

plant communities. Allow pilot studies for research purposes. Use adaptive management, the process of changing land management as a result of monitoring or research. Manage recreation resources for low to moderate use levels.

The ROD listed more specific objectives that tiered off of this broad objective, including “Livestock Grazing” as follows:

Objective: If and where appropriate, use livestock grazing as a vegetation management tool to support the primary goal of wetland restoration.

Recommended general management to meet this objective, is as follows:

Use livestock grazing mainly as a management tool to support the primary goal of wetland restoration. Livestock grazing could be allowed if needed to create or maintain wildlife habitat. No long term grazing lease will be issued. Levels and duration of grazing, as well as maintenance and construction of range improvement projects, will be dependent on the need to meet management objectives. It is expected that the amount of grazing will be significantly less than that allowed under Alternative A of the PRMP/FEIS (*this alternative was similar to past grazing use*), and it is possible that no grazing will occur. It is estimated that grazing use will not exceed 1,500 animal unit months in any given year. Any livestock use could be authorized and allowed via competitive bid contract for the purposes of vegetative management and evaluated on a year by year basis. In lieu of or in addition to livestock grazing, haying of portions of the property will be considered as an alternative if vegetative removal was necessary to meet the wetland restoration goals. The allotment is initially categorized as an “M”, or maintain, category allotment. The same planning (RMP/EIS) constraints and direction listed under Alternative A of the PRMP/FEIS would also apply to this (preferred) alternative.

During at least the last five years of private ownership (1988-1992), the Wood River Ranch was operated as a cow/calf operation with up to 1,300 pairs of cattle. The season-of-use was typically late April through November, although the on and off dates varied. In 1993 and 1994, the BLM and ALC grazing leases allowed for a season-of-use of May 1st through November 30th, with up to 1,300 pairs (a maximum of 7,200 AUMs).

Since the ROD, there has been no livestock grazing on Wood River, nor has there been any identified need or utility for livestock grazing. The property has been undergoing high intensity wetland restoration activities, since the grazing ceased in 1994, in order to move expeditiously towards the overriding goal of wetland restoration. ***Because much of the property is now flooded from October-August, it has limited potential for grazing, and grazing is considered largely*** inconsistent with the current functioning of the properties facilities and resources. Thus, there are no current plans to re-issue any grazing lease or allow any other grazing use. This assessment operates from that basic premise.

Current BLM policy direction is to primarily address grazing use as it relates to the 5 Standards for Rangeland Health (W.O.I.M. #98-91 and I.B. #OR-98-315). If one or more of the Standards are not met and the cause is not grazing, solutions may be pursued through non-range related remedies. Although non-grazing causes may be identified if known, non-range remedies are beyond the scope of this assessment. Because of this current direction and the fact that Wood River will probably not be grazed, the following assessment is fairly cursory. (References to the PRMP/FEIS and/or ROD are noted where appropriate.)

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STANDARD 1 - WATERSHED FUNCTION - UPLANDS (Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates, moisture storage and stability that are appropriate to soil, climate and land form.)

This standard is being met on the property.

The property is considered virtually all riparian or wetland in nature (see pages 2-10 to 2-13 and 2-18 in the PRMP/FEIS), with the ongoing restoration project work ensuring that it stays that way. Although the property is diked, it is allowed to flood during the winter and spring in keeping with the overall objective to restore the

“...previous function as a wetland community...”. During its use as a cattle ranch, the dikes allowed the property to be pumped and kept relatively dry for the grazing season.

Although this Standard may not be currently applicable on this allotment, the northern 1/3 of the property was listed in the PRMP/FEIS (page 2-24) as being “the upland area” with the soils classified as “Kirk-Chock Association”. This soil type was described as a poorly drained soil type that occurs on flood plain. This association of soils is subject to frequent flooding in spring where not protected by dikes. Even on Wood River which is diked, this area can be partially inundated in the spring. Prior to the recent project work, this area was dominated by Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*). This vegetation state was artificially induced agriculturally and perpetuated with the intense cattle grazing.

However, the native vegetation on this soil association is described in the Plan as a wet meadow plant community dominated by tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*), with northern manna-grass (*Glyceria borealis*), reedgrass (*Phragmites communis*), and Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*) in very wet spots (PRMP/FEIS page 2-18). This latter vegetation community will probably re-establish over time with the current property management. Given this primary intent, the fact that trends are strongly upwards (i.e. moving towards the native plant community), and that cattle grazing will not occur (and then only within the context of the primary objectives) - this Standard is considered met.

STANDARD 2 - WATERSHED FUNCTION - RIPARIAN/WETLAND AREAS (Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning physical condition appropriate to soil, climate, and land form.)

Though not totally met, significant progress is being made towards meeting this Standard on the property - livestock are not significant contributors.

As noted in the previous objective statements, the primary goal for management of this property is to “Restore the Wood River property to its previous function as a wetland community...”. All current ongoing management activities are directed towards that goal. Although no grazing is occurring on the property, any in the future must be “...mainly as a management tool to support the primary goal of wetland restoration.”

The PRMP/FEIS discussed the riparian and wetland portions of the Wood River property in some depth. At the time of the writing of the plan, the southern 2/3 of the property was also de facto “upland” vegetation due to the water management for cattle grazing. The following is excerpted from the plan (page 2-18):

The southern two-thirds of the property, with soils classified as Lather Muck association, is currently dominated by quackgrass (*Agropyron repens*). These poorly drained soils are derived from reclaimed lake bottom sediment, so the native vegetation probably consisted of wetland and emergent vegetation, such as bulrush (*Scripus* spp.), cattail (*Typha* spp.), and wocus lily (*Nuphar polysepalum*). This portion of the Wood River property has been used mainly for irrigated pasture.

However, portions of the property in the extreme SE corner were aquatic in nature at the time of purchase. These areas are also described in the PRMP/FEIS (page 2-18):

The southeast portion of the property is part of the Wood River Marsh, which has water depths up to three feet. The native vegetation, which is also the existing vegetation, includes aquatic and emergent vegetation, growing in ponded histosol soils. The area is dominated by bulrush and cattails, with wocus lily in some of the deeper water areas. Plant species comprising the submerged/emerged vegetation in this area include curly leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*), Coontail (*Ceratophyllon demersum*), sago pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*), horsetail (*Equisetum* spp.), and other pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.).

Although the restoration of native plant communities has yet to be fully completed, the primary goal for property management is to achieve such and the current trends of the vegetation composition changes are strongly upwards (i.e. towards more complete native communities). Grazing use, if any is ever allowed, would be totally subservient to the wetland restoration goals. Thus, though this Standard is probably not fully met at present, significant (and

aggressive) progress is being made towards meeting it. Since there is no livestock grazing and has not been for 5 years, livestock are not a present factor.

STANDARD 3 - ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES (Healthy, productive and diverse plant and animal populations and communities appropriate to soil, climate and land form are supported by ecological processes of nutrient cycling, energy flow and the hydrologic cycle.)

Though not totally met, significant progress is being made towards meeting this Standard on the property - livestock are not significant contributors.

This Standard is closely related to Standards 1 and 2, in that the meeting of (or making significant progress towards meeting) both those standards is a strong indication that the ecological processes are functioning fully or moving towards full functioning. Although the property is probably not yet functioning as well at its pre-development capabilities, the trend towards full functioning is strongly upwards. As noted earlier in this document, the primary objective for all management on this property is to re-establish ecological functions. The property would easily be considered as making very significant progress towards meeting this Standard.

STANDARD 4 - WATER QUALITY (Surface water and groundwater quality, influenced by agency actions, complies with State water quality standards.)

This standard is not being met on the property - (BLM licensed) livestock are not significant contributors.

Agency Lake is a 303(d) listed water body due to a variety of summer water quality problems: chlorophyll a, dissolved oxygen, and pH. As noted in the narratives for the first 3 Standards, all current BLM management on the property is oriented towards proper functioning conditions that would lead to improvements in water quality. The overall objective for the property includes the phrase - "Long-term improvements in water quality entering Agency Lake is the goal". So although the lake is not currently meeting water quality standards, all management on the property is directed towards helping provide high quality water to the lake which would be expected to help incrementally improve its overall quality. Whether that input helps Agency Lake to become "de-listed" is unknown and probably unknowable, at this time.

In any event, current livestock grazing on the property (none) is not a factor in Agency Lakes failure to meet state water quality standards. However, up stream, private land cattle grazing, is most likely contributing significantly to this problem but is entirely beyond BLM control or influence.

STANDARD 5 - NATIVE, T&E, and LOCALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES (Habitats support healthy, productive and diverse populations and communities of native plants and animals (including special status species and species of local importance) appropriate to soil, climate and land form.)

This standard is being met on the allotment.

The ROD had the following overall wildlife related objectives for the property. In the "Special Status Species Habitat" section:

Objective: Manage for a diversity of habitats for special status species (see Table 3 of the PRMP/FEIS). Maintain a viable populations of spotted frogs on the property. Protect habitats of federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species; to avoid contributing to the need to list category 1 and 2 federal candidate, state listed, and Bureau sensitive species.

In the "Fish and Wildlife Habitat" section was the following:

Objective: Improve habitat conditions for suckers and salmonid; improve habitat for raptors and

neotropical migratory birds; and optimize waterfowl habitat within the constraints of other resource objectives.

Following these ROD objectives is some general guidance on how that management would be generally implemented. Thus, a primary goal guiding all management of this property is to ***emphasize*** quality wildlife habitat - especially for listed species. As noted earlier in this document, even though conditions on Wood River are not fully functional at present, all efforts are ***directed*** at restoring such functionality. This will include improved ecological conditions for all native plant and animal species. Given this emphasis, this Standard is considered met, or (at worst) making significant progress towards meeting the Standard is being made.

Current Management and Recent Management Changes

As noted earlier in this document, the most notable management changes in recent years on this property has been the total removal of all livestock and the ongoing wetland restoration activities and projects. No change in this course of action is envisioned in the future. It is not expected that cattle will be allowed to graze the property in the foreseeable future and its future status as a grazing allotment is tenuous at best.

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